



<https://www.voiceless.org.au/>

## VOICELESS KANGAROO REPORT

### Kangaroos

Australia's iconic kangaroos are hunted in the largest commercial slaughter of land-based wildlife on the planet.<sup>1</sup> Almost 90 million kangaroos and wallabies have been lawfully killed for commercial purposes in the last 20 years.<sup>2</sup>



A multi-million dollar meat and skin industry<sup>3</sup> has been built on the suffering of our country's most beloved native animal. In 2012 the Australian government allowed up to 5.2 million kangaroos and wallabies<sup>4</sup> to be commercially hunted. More will be killed for non-commercial purposes such as damage mitigation and recreational hunting. This cruel slaughter is tolerated because of a false perception that kangaroos are a 'pest'<sup>5</sup> and a 'sustainable resource'.<sup>6</sup>

Pest or precious?

According to a 2011 [report](#) by THINKK, the think tank for kangaroos, the notion of kangaroos as costly pests to Australian farmers has been significantly overstated. Current research indicates that kangaroos do not exist in abundance or pest proportions and that the cost to farmers should be revised down from \$200 million to \$44 million, or \$1.67 per kangaroo per year.

Kangaroo killing for commercial and non-commercial purposes may also threaten the survival of the species. They are put at risk by shooters who hunt outside the sanctioned areas<sup>7</sup> and kill species other than those permitted under law.<sup>8</sup>

#### Cruel treatment

The Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare concluded in its 1988 report into the killing of kangaroos that, "To some extent, cruelty to kangaroos has become institutionalised through the system of kangaroo management."<sup>9</sup>

Because kangaroos are shot in the wild and at night,<sup>10</sup> when they are most active, the cruelty associated with the slaughter of kangaroos is largely hidden from the public eye.

Almost **90 million** kangaroos and wallabies have been lawfully killed for commercial purposes in the last 20 years.



While shooters are required by Commercial and Non-Commercial Codes of Practice<sup>11</sup> to aim to shoot a kangaroo in the brain and therefore achieve an instantaneous death,<sup>12</sup> many factors affect the ability of a shooter to achieve this.<sup>13</sup>

Non-fatal body shots are an unavoidable part of the industry, causing horrific and painful injuries. Data collected from meat processing plants by RSPCA Australia in 2002 indicated that 120,000 (or 4%) of kangaroos were mis-shot, while Animal Liberation NSW data from chillers (holding facilities for carcasses) indicated that over one million kangaroos (or 40%) may have been mis-shot annually between 2005 and 2008.<sup>14</sup> The lack of industry monitoring makes it difficult to establish more accurate figures.

A vivid picture of the types of injuries that occur is painted by the words of a former commercial kangaroo shooter: "The mouth of a kangaroo can be blown off and the kangaroo can escape to die of shock and starvation. Forearms can be blown off, as can ears, eyes and noses. Stomachs can be hit expelling the contents with the kangaroo still alive. Backbones can be pulverized to an unrecognisable state etc. Hind legs can be shattered with the kangaroo desperately trying to get away on the other or without the use of either. To deny that this goes on is just an exercise in attempting to fool the public."<sup>15</sup>

#### Joeys as collateral damage

Kangaroos are social animals who live in large groups called mobs.<sup>16</sup> Mothers and joeys (young kangaroos) form close bonds and communicate with each other using unique calls.<sup>17</sup>

The death of these joeys is 'collateral damage' to the killing of female kangaroos. Under the Codes of Practice, shooters must 'euthanase' the joeys of any female that is killed by using the following methods:

- for a small furless pouch young, a 'single forceful blow to the base of the skull' or 'stunning, immediately followed by decapitation';
- for furred pouch young, a 'single forceful blow to the base of the skull'; and
- for young at foot, a 'single shot to the brain or heart where it can be delivered accurately and in safety'.[18](#)

Dependent joeys who are not caught and killed in accordance with the Codes of Practice die as a result of starvation, exposure or predation without their mothers to teach them vital survival skills such as finding food, water and shelter.[19](#) On a 10 year average, it is estimated that 800,000 dependent joeys are killed as collateral damage of the kangaroo industry each year.[20](#)

RSPCA Australia reviewed the Codes of Practice in 2002 and recommended that they include a condition to stop the shooting of females who are carrying pouch young.[21](#) This, it believes, is the only way to stop the potential of cruelty to the pouch young.[22](#) This recommendation was not taken up in the 2008 revision of the Codes of Practice.[23](#) The 2011 THINKK report has reiterated the need for the Commercial Code to be amended to mandate a 'males only' kill.[24](#)

Watch a presentation on the kangaroo industry by Keely Boom, research fellow with THINKK, the think tank for kangaroos, and an expert in animal law and environmental law. Filmed at Voiceless's [2012 Animal Law Lecture Series](#).

Learn more

- Read Voiceless council member Deidre Wick's column of May 2012 "[Cute baby seals and kangaroo pests](#)"
- Download the latest report from THINKK, '[Kangaroo Court: Enforcement of the law governing kangaroo killing](#)'.
- Comprehensive resources are available from [THINKK, the think tank for kangaroos](#), based at the University of Technology Sydney and supported by Voiceless.

*Last updated November 2016*

- [1.](#) Rhey Linden, 'Killing for the Flesh and Skin Trade: Neither Clean & Green, nor Sustainable' in Maryland Wilson and David B. Croft (eds), Kangaroo Myths and Realities (Australian Wildlife Protection Council, 3rd ed, 2005) 86.
- [2.](#) Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Kangaroo Statistics (6 January 2012) <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/wild-harvest/k...>
- [3.](#) John Kelly, Kangaroo Industry Background (July 2008) Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia <http://www.kangaroo-industry.asn.au/morinfo/BACKGR1.HTM>

- [4.](#) Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Commercial Kangaroo Harvest Quotas 2012 (6 January 2012) <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/wild-harvest/k...>
- [5.](#) Tony Pople and Gordon Grigg, Commercial Harvesting of Kangaroos in Australia (1999) Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/publications/k...>
- [6.](#) Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Commercial Kangaroo Harvesting Fact Sheet (2011) <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/publications/k...>
- [7.](#) D A Thomsen and J Davies, 'Rules, norms and strategies of kangaroo harvest' (2008) 14 Australasian Journal of Environmental Management 123
- [8.](#) Morris v Department of Environment and Climate Change [2008] NSWLEC 309.
- [9.](#) Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Kangaroos (1988) [8.2]. Further, one of the six members of the Committee published a minority report in which he concluded, "For the welfare of the kangaroos, the industry should be closed.... The welfare of the kangaroo, our national animal, must be placed ahead of commercial interests and inept bureaucrats. The present slaughter must cease." (Senator Norm Sanders, 201-203)
- [10.](#) Glenys Oogjes, 'Band-Aid Code Will Not Stop Joey Cruelty—Only an End to the Practices Will Do That' in Kangaroos Myths and Realities, (Australian Wildlife Protection Council, 3rd ed, 2005) 110.
- [11.](#) National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes (2008); National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Non-commercial Purposes (2008).
- [12.](#) Ibid, s 2.4, 'Point of aim' and 'Goal'.
- [13.](#) Factors include impaired vision due to darkness and distance, weather conditions, the small target size of a kangaroo's head, unexpected movements of kangaroos who are startled from being shot at, and the skill and experience of the individual shooter. David Nicholls, 'The Kangaroo – Falsely Maligned by Tradition' in Maryland Wilson and David B Croft (eds), Kangaroos - Myths and Realities (2005) 33, 38.
- [14.](#) Ben-Ami D, Boom K, Boronyak L, Townend C, Ramp D, Croft D, Bekoff M, 'The welfare ethics of the commercial killing of free-ranging kangaroos: an evaluation of the benefits and costs of the industry' (2014) 23 Animal Welfare 1, 5. The large difference in the RSPCA Australia and Animal Liberation NSW estimates is due to differences in sampling methodology. Animal Liberation NSW sampling was based on whether the head was severed at or below the atlantal-occipital joint, which Ben-Ami et al (2014) argue is the most efficient point to sever a kangaroo's head. Ben-Ami et al (2014) argue that a shooter would be unlikely to engage in this difficult cut unless it was necessary to conceal a neck wound. RSPCA sampling was based on bullet entry points in carcasses. See also Ben-Ami D, Boom K, Boronyak L, Croft D, Ramp D, Townend C, The ends and means of the commercial kangaroo industry: an ecological, legal and comparative analysis (THINKK, UTS, 2011) 3, 16-17.

- [15.](#) David Nicholls, 'The Kangaroo – Falsely Maligned by Tradition' in Maryland Wilson and David B Croft (eds), Kangaroos - Myths and Realities (2005) 38
- [16.](#) D Ben-Ami, A Shot in the Dark: A Report on Kangaroo Harvesting (2009) 34  
[http://www.wildlifeadvocate.com/pdf/a\\_shot\\_in\\_the\\_dark.pdf](http://www.wildlifeadvocate.com/pdf/a_shot_in_the_dark.pdf)
- [17.](#) C Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe, Life of Marsupials (CSIRO Publishing, 2005) 329.
- [18.](#) National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes (2008) s 5.1; National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Non-commercial Purposes (2008) s 5.1.
- [19.](#) D. B. Croft, 'Kangaroo management: individuals and communities' (2004) 26 (1) Australian Mammalogy, 101-8.
- [20.](#) See Ben-Ami D, Boom K, Boronyak L, Townend C, Ramp D, Croft D and Bekoff M, 'The welfare ethics of the commercial killing of free ranging kangaroos: an evaluation of the benefits and costs of the industry' (2014) 23(1) Animal Welfare 1, 5. Estimation based on ecological data and national commercial kill statistics for the period 2000-2009. This does not include the joeys killed as a consequence of non-commercial shooting. Numbers of joeys killed or left to die are not recorded. Accordingly, figures are a 10 year projection based on the authors' calculations (methods outlined in the article) and the national commercial kill statistics provided by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Population and Communities in 2010.
- [21.](#) RSPCA, Kangaroo Shooting Code Compliance – A Survey of the Extent of Compliance with the Requirements of the Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos (2002) para 5.2.2.
- [22.](#) Ibid.
- [23.](#) National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes (2008) s 5.; National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Non-commercial Purposes (2008) s 5.
- [24.](#) Above n 14, 39.